

THE LEISURE HOUR.

A FAMILY JOURNAL OF INSTRUCTION AND RECREATION.

"BEHOLD IN THESE WHAT LEISURE HOURS DEMAND,—AMUSEMENT AND TRUE KNOWLEDGE HAND IN HAND."—*Cotter.*



HOW THE CANDLE WAS GOT OUT OF THE BARREL OF GUNPOWDER.

FIRE STORIES.

I RECALL another story of my early days, and this, too, connected with a holiday at Christmas. In this instance, the house, of which my father was an inmate, was preserved from peril of fire. My father was wont to say he always thought there must have been some special guardianship over that house, seeing that, notwithstanding sundry instances of carelessness, and frequent incidents full of threatening danger, neither house nor inmates ever came to serious damage.

Thomas, one of the young men, had brief leave of ab-

sence to visit friends and home, to spend his Christmas. On a dark December morning he rose before four o'clock, and was the first in the house to come down stairs to a room where, overnight, provision had been made for his breakfast. The meal was soon despatched, and he was ready to start before any one else had appeared.

He took up the candle to light his way through the housekeeper's room, that he might leave the house by a back door. Presuming that some other of the household would soon come down and would require the light, he set down the candle on the window-seat, and went his way.

The window and seat were of somewhat singular construction. The seat was of moderate breadth, and, in the day time, served as a shelf to support a row of flower-pots with bright flowers, which added cheerfulness to a room always particularly neat and clean. At night the flower-pots were removed, and a shutter, sliding in a groove, was closed and fastened against intruders. Attached to the shutter was a projecting handle of wood, which served to draw it forward, or to thrust it backward, as occasion required.

Having hastily set down the candle on his departure, and left it burning, Thomas did not observe that he had so placed it, that its blaze was directly under the projecting handle, though at some distance below it. The effect of such an arrangement for producing mischief may be easily imagined. The steady burning of the candle, undisturbed by any movement of the air, acting on a dry peg perpendicularly over it, soon scorched the peg, kindled it to a slow smouldering flame, which caught the substance of the shutter, and, gradually gathering strength, crept upwards towards the window-frame and the wainscot above. Thomas was speeding his way across the snow, utterly unconscious of the threatened peril. He knew not how soon his master's premises might have become a prey to devouring fire, whilst even he might have been unable clearly to account for the origin of the catastrophe.

But how was the place saved? It fell out on this wise. Dennis, another of the "hands," after some time rose and dressed, and came down stairs. As he came down he noticed a smell of burning. On entering the room he found at once how matters stood, and was startled to see a considerable portion of the shutter glowing red, whilst a multitude of little flickering flames seemed to chase one another on the charred surface. Wisely, perhaps without thought about it—without knowing it was wise—he opened no door, and made no stir. He quietly and promptly removed the candle, caught up a damp cloth, broke away the remains of the glowing peg, dabbed over the crackling face of the burning shutter, and by the time a companion from above had joined him, he had partly conquered the fiery foe at the expense of a few blisters on his hands. His companion speedily procured a bucket of water, with which the shutter and window-seat were soon well drenched, and for that time the house and property of the master, and may be the lives of some of the household, were saved, whilst the cause of the danger was at once clearly perceived and thoroughly explained.

The same premises, which were put in peril by the burning shutter, were otherwise remarkably preserved. At the back of the building was a certain warehouse or storeroom, which was dark, or nearly dark, the only light coming in by the door when it was set open. There a great variety of goods was kept in stock, and thence smaller quantities of them were transferred for the retail business of the shop. In this dark chamber (strange as it may seem, it is still to be stated as the truth) was deposited a large store of gunpowder, an article about which amazing carelessness is often manifest.

To this chamber the two youths went together to fill some drawers, or to fetch some articles for the retail trade, one of them carrying the necessary candle. When they had obtained the required articles, instead of immediately returning with them to the shop, they began to play tricks with each other. Sundry extemporaneous gymnastic feats were performed, for the amusement of the performers only, resulting at last in the extinction and loss of the candle. A smart blow from the hand of one of them accidentally struck the candlestick in the hand

of the other. The sudden jerk displaced the short piece of burning candle, which was only loosely put in the socket, and in its fall the light was utterly extinguished. The game suddenly ceased. The performers in this comedy, which was nearer being a tragedy than they knew, were at once sobered, and both anxiously sought the fallen candle. In vain they felt over the floor in the gloom. In vain, to assist their search, they let in all the daylight the door would admit. What they sought could nowhere be found. At length, abandoning the search, the youths agreed, with some queer qualms, to leave the warehouse, to replace the candlestick on its shelf, and to say nothing of what had happened.

Some weeks afterwards, one of them was sent to the same storeroom to fill a shop-canister with gunpowder. Carefully placing his candle at some distance from the barrel containing the powder, he prepared to fill the canister. He noticed that the top or cover was pushed aside, leaving a considerable portion of the barrel quite uncovered. As he passed his hand into the opening to fulfil his task, he took up a lump of something which was certainly not what he wanted. There should be no lumps in gunpowder. His astonishment can hardly be conceived when he discovered in this intrusive substance *the long lost candle!* On examining, he found it must have fallen with its wick directly downwards, so as to flatten the soft and saturated cotton against the surface of the gunpowder, with which the previously melted portion of the candle was incrustated. He saw in a moment the frightful danger to which he and his companion had been unconsciously exposed, and the wonderful deliverance they had experienced. He reflected on the folly which had occasioned the danger, and resolved never again to play tricks in any similar circumstances. In this case the very source of danger was made the means of deliverance. The combustible compound was in contact with the candle, but the sudden dab of liquid grease excluded the air, extinguished the flame, and prevented a terrible explosion.

On another occasion, in the same premises, in the same storeroom, destruction was averted by the courage and promptitude of one of the women-servants of the family. Employed about the place was a certain almost half-witted lad. The benevolent master had been prompted by a kindly heart to give the poor lad something to do. Though weak in intellect, he was strong in thews and muscle; willing to work, he showed his gratitude by doing with all readiness such rough labour as a porter could do, or running on such errands as he could clearly understand.

One day he was sent (not very wisely) to the dark room to fill, for the retail business, an empty powder canister. He procured a candle, without a candlestick, and, having lighted it, went on his errand. When he wished to fill the canister from the stock in the barrel he was at some loss what to do with his candle. Utterly forgetful at the moment of the danger of his task, and seemingly unconscious of the need of caution, at once to relieve his hand and to get the most convenient light for his work, he extemporized a candlestick in rather hazardous material. Having removed the cover, he stuck into the loose gunpowder in the open barrel the lower end of his long thin candle. Who ever heard of such a candlestick before? By the light so conveniently close to his work, he scooped up the black grains with his palm and poured them into the canister, as if they had been so much harmless sand.

Had Jack at this point taken up the candle and returned from his errand, it is probable that nothing more would have been known about his dangerous feat, and

the peril the place and its inmates had escaped. The deliverance which was wrought was rendered the more remarkable by the discovery of what he had done.

Having, without accident, obtained the requisite supply, Jack departed from the chamber with his well-filled canister, without having thought of removing the burning candle.

For a long while he did not remember his neglect. At last the remembrance came, and with it a frightful and convulsive agitation of the half-silly lad.

"What can be the matter?" said the foreman.

"What is all this about?" said the master.

The more he was asked, the less Jack seemed able to tell. His limbs trembled; his face was deadly pale; his eyes were starting with terror. He was suddenly awake to a sense of impending peril, whilst fear seemed to destroy the power of speech.

A maid-servant, who was very kind to Jack, and had great influence over him, was called to try if she could solve the mystery, or get the dreadful secret disclosed. At length, as she sought to soothe and persuade him, the lad pointed in the direction of the storeroom, and faintly, chokingly uttered the words—

"Candle—*powder*."

The afternoon errand was at once called to mind. The threatening danger was in a moment pretty well appreciated, though its precise character was not thoroughly understood. Every moment was precious; but of all the men standing by, not one dare volunteer to attempt a rescue.

The gentle, quiet woman is sometimes found to be most determined when her energies are forcibly called into play. Whilst the men were stunned or hesitating, Susan, without saying a word, volunteered as "the forlorn hope." She ran to the storeroom, quite aware that there was great risk, though she did not thoroughly understand its character till she entered the door of the chamber. She then saw that the lighted candle was standing literally *in the powder*, revealing by its light the circular mouth of the barrel which contained it. More than this, she saw, as she drew near, that the candle, though happily whole and long when Jack took it, had burned away since it had been placed there, till the blazing wick was a dull red cap on the top of it, and it had almost reached the very surface of the powder.

Susan looked on for a moment. As she looked, the candle burned, casting its sheen upon the dull, black grains around it, silently declaring the full extent of imminent danger. In a few minutes an explosion must have followed. Not a moment was to be lost; yet a hasty snatch might have ruined all. Providentially Susan's presence of mind did not forsake her, nor was there any failure of the courage and self-control on which so much depended.

With prompt ingenuity she laid the back of the fingers of one hand in the palm of the other, and opening the fingers of both hands in the centre, they formed a sort of dish with a hole in the middle. Susan looked down as the threatening candle continued to burn. Steadily, and without hesitation, the united hands were lowered, knuckles downward, into the dangerous barrel, in such wise that the opening between the fingers was carefully passed over the wick with its dull red cap, without touching it, till the fingers rested on the gunpowder below and around it. The fingers were then softly but firmly closed upon the tallow, and with the candle thus inclosed the hands were gently withdrawn.

All this was done in less time than it has taken to describe, whilst the mode of doing it was afterwards made out partly from Susan's own account, confirmed

by the fact that after her achievement she astonished the group of still waiting terrified men, by appearing in the midst of them with the burning candle end still compressed between her fingers. Before they could ask a question, poor Susan suddenly fell fainting on the floor. The strength of her will, and the tension of her nerves, having borne her up till the deed was done, it will excite little surprise that such a collapse should follow.

We talk of heroism. Was there nothing heroic in the deed of this humble and now forgotten woman? Her family and her family name must alike remain unrecorded.

Doubtless Jack would feel doubly attached to Susan; whilst every inmate of the house would acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the genuine though unostentatious heroine by whom so singular a deliverance had been wrought. She did not herself seem to think she had done anything extraordinary, and only sought that Jack might never again be sent on a similar errand.

We recognise the efficient agency of this woman. Can we fail to recognise the special interposition of a guardian Providence, not only, in spite of human carelessness, averting the exceeding danger, but in giving the remarkable calmness and fortitude by which, in this marvellous deliverance, the human agent was sustained?

But is there not a special Providence over every house and household? How helpless are we in the hours of darkness and of sleep! How utterly unable to take care of ourselves! whilst the multitude of our neighbours are in like condition, powerless to shield themselves or to ward off danger from their friends. Is it not true that "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman watcheth in vain?" This thought has sometimes been peculiarly striking and impressive when I have slept, or attempted to sleep, for the first night of a sojourn in London. The thought of the thousands in a town, or the tens of thousands in a great city, liable to innumerable dangers, yet nightly lost for hours in profound, death-like sleep, is overwhelming, and would be appalling and terrible, but that the mass of them rise morning by morning unharmed, and night by night retire to rest as if safety were a thing of course.

I will try to give you some notion of a first night in London. For hours after the ordinary time of rest in country residences, I noted and *felt* the contrast between the silence of my home and the noise of the great city. Ceaselessly moving, rolls onwards the stream of life and traffic: heavy laden waggons grinding and jolting along the paved streets, and shaking the house; light carts spinning merrily along, to finish the business or pleasure of the day; long omnibuses taking homewards to the suburbs late relays of passengers; coaches, cabs, and all sorts of vehicles. Mingling with the rush of wheels and the sharp "click clack" of iron-hoofed quadrupeds, you hear the tramp of human feet on the stone pavement, and human voices occasionally shouting aloud, sometimes in angry dispute with a companion, a cad, a "cabby," or a porter; sometimes in merriment or wanton fun; sometimes most unmusically stumbling, with drunken voice, through the last stage of some stupid song. These city noises may all be heard by the weary sleepless visitor as he lies uneasily in bed. What a babel of sounds! This is the roar of London, which habitual dwellers never hear, as they slumber in spite of it, or are lulled to sleep by it! but which will not suffer a countryman to sleep at all.

I listened to it rising and surging through the night, suggesting many strange thoughts, and sometimes a little disturbing the temper: till towards morning, about

two A. M., there is a lull, something approaching to a pause, and even London gets its silent or almost silent hours. Then I began to doze and dream; and I must needs dream of fire.

I had read a notice on some church door: "In case of fire, the keys of the engine are at No. —, round the corner." Beneath it was a list of "Precautions to be observed in case of fire," which I did not stay to read. I had marked the assurance of a supply of water, in the almost hieroglyphic indication on many house fronts—

F. P.
15 Ft. I had seen last evening, at the end of the next street, the queer machinery of telescopic ladders, and sacking, and wheels, which I had ascertained to be "a fire escape," in case of need; and lastly, there was the broad glare of some actually consuming dwelling, to which attention had been directed just before going to bed.

Thus, what with the unusual sights and scenes, and excitements of the previous day, and the noise and disturbance of the night, no wonder that imagination should run riot in my broken sleep.

I awoke from a dream with a start, and began to think it real, or that it might be real. I began to reckon how many flights of stairs I had climbed in coming to rest, or rather to that chamber which should have been a place of rest. I recalled the height from the window-sill to the pavement, which looked something frightful when, before undressing, I took a peep at the lamps below—to say nothing of the area and its iron palisades. I remembered those girls who preceded me on the landing, and thought how carelessly they carried their candle, almost in contact with loose flying inflammable drapery, and how, with similar carelessness, they might have used the candle in their room. I reflected that there were twenty people in the house, likely to be equally careless, and among them the gentleman in the room below, of whom I had discovered that he sometimes finished his novel and his last cigar for the day after he was in bed. Then it was clear enough that there were unextinguished embers in sundry fire-places as I came up-stairs; there were many yards of gas-pipe, and I knew not how many gas-burners in the lower part of the house, which by some possible leakage might fill any room with a compound explosive as gunpowder.

Listening awhile with painful suspense for any sound in the house, till I seemed to hear the silence, overpowering weariness brought a momentary doze, only to be haunted by a dream of some ignorant searcher taking a candle to see where the smell of gas came from, and thus blowing the whole front of the house into the street.* The house was shaken from top to bottom; and, supposing the floor was sinking beneath me, I rushed to the window to know the worst, and discovered that the explosion was occasioned by a departing visitor about to take a very early train. He had slammed the door on going out, regardless of the wakeful, the slumberers, or the dreamers within. Vexed with this new disturbance, I lay down again in hope of repose at last. But troublesome conjectures hindered any sound sleep. Among the letters in "The Times," expounding or suggesting possible causes of so many fires, I had read one from a householder, who said he came home late one night (having the power of the latch-key) after all the family were in bed. Requiring a light, he sought for matches to obtain it. To his consternation he saw something glowing, all but blazing, on the mantel-shelf in the kitchen. He found it to be a box of phosphorescent lucifers, which, being placed on a shelf heated by a strong

fire, had smouldered till the box containing them was scorched to a deep brown tint, and the matches needed but the slightest friction or air to anticipate the explosive combustion, which apparently must have soon burst out had they been left to themselves. How could I tell but some of those untaught servants, or if instructed, oblivious of instruction, or not believing it, ignorant of the kindling-point of lucifers, and knowing nothing of the chemistry of matches, and the theory of combustion; how could I know but that some of those servants (so strangely stowed away at night, in some undiscoverable recesses, when all the rest of the household have retired) might have strewed some of these dangerous articles on the floor, or left them all but incandescent on the heated mantel-piece.

I had conjured up sufficient causes for suspicion, if not for alarm; and began to wish I was at home in that snug country dwelling where I could look round every night, the last thing, and assure myself, so far as human vigilance could do it, that all was safe.

Again I say, it is right, meet, and very proper to have a constant sense of our helplessness, and of our dependence on the power and goodness of an ever present and presiding Providence. Thrice happy they who, in regard to every form both of inward and outward danger, can say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

THE WREN-BOYS.

It is a snowy Stephen's Day in a certain Irish town: there is the silence of a universal holiday. Few feet hurry past the windows, on the dazzling footpath; for nobody is going to labour, and pleasure-seekers do not care to be abroad in the biting cold.

Likewise, this day is regarded as an integral part of Christmas, during which there is nothing to do but enjoyment—unless, as concerns the Roman Catholic majority, a certain portion of religious performance. Chapel-bells have been ringing twice as much as usual, since long before daybreak this morning; and then the streets were populous enough with proceeding worshippers. But now it is past noon, after which no mass can be said. All devout Romanists in the city have succeeded in "getting mass," however, ere now; consequently, have comfortable consciences for the time being.

Presently, through the stillness of muffled wheels and few footsteps, comes a sort of wild chorus borne on the air, very distant and round many corners at first. It sounds quite musical from our fireside—considerably more so than when our ears make a nearer investigation, as the choristers enter the street. Everybody knows that it is "the wren-boys," immemorially connected with our Irish Stephen's Days. They take the houses in order, singing their rude melody before each, and levying a species of black-mail in succession. Now they are before the doctor's, where a whole bevy of bright-eyed children crowd to the windows, the smallest standing on chairs, secured by the arms of the elder. What delight! That boisterous boy—clothed inexplicably in straw—shaggy as a porcupine—dances a hornpipe for the delectation of the young ones. What clapping of hands! The music is an asthmatic fife, with many notes in a wheezing condition. The boy's straw helmet whirls off amid his exertions, revealing a head sufficiently shaggy, over a cravat of straw—reassuring to the younger children, who had hitherto thought him a merry species of

* I knew a case in which this was actually done.

monster. Now the fife stays awhile, and the chorus is led off again :—

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
St. Stephen's Day was cot in the furze;
Although she is little, her family's great,
And we pray ye, good ladies, to give us a trate."

Public attention is thus directed to the huge holly-bush that waves in the air, blooming with a variety of colours that proceed not from its native berries; streamers of pink calico, and roses of white, have been affixed to various sprays; and in the midst is a tiny framework, more like a miniature four-post bed than anything else, containing, alack! the slain body of a golden-crested wren.

"There's a rale wren this time, miss, an' no mistake!" shouted the chief of the gang to the doctor's eldest daughter, who a year ago had made a derogatory remark on the fact that the enshrined bird proved nothing but a hapless sparrow. "A rale wren this time. An' hadn't we the hunt for him, may be?"

Chorus taken up by all the others, appropriate pantomime accompanying :—

"We followed the wren three miles an' more—
Three miles an' more—our jackets is tore;
We knocked him down, we could not see,
But we've brought him home in the ivy-tree."

"Cruel, cruel boys!" cries the doctor's second little daughter, quite overcome by the doggel and its sad commentary in the wee dead bird; and the tender-hearted child could scarcely be comforted. The wren-boys' donation at that house was much curtailed by her beseeching: "Give nothing, mamma, to the horrid fellows who killed the dear little wren."

Such feeling was rather exceptional. It quite amazed the wren-boys themselves, who thought no more of knocking their tiny prey on the head, than the ardent sportsman does of converting into dead flesh his fifty brace of living, enjoying, beautiful birds, for the sake of the pleasure of correct aim. To next door they trudged, and began another section of the doggel :—

"The wren of all birds he is the king,
Though the eagle says he's no such thing:
We'll put 'em both upon our knees—"

"Mickey, ashore," says the ringleader, stopping short. "What for would we be afther wastin' our time here? Sure this is the lady's that never gives nothin' at all in charity, only sits as grand as an image in the windy, an' tells the beggars to go off to the poorhouse. If we wor to bring her a houseful o' wrans, she wouldn't be a bit the pleasanter in herself: so come along."

"Up wid the kettle an' down wid the pan,
Give us our answer an' let us begane!"

But the silent house responded not to the appeal, and with a few satirical comments on the inmates, the party moved away, to recommence their refrain in a more favourable direction :—

"Drolling, drolling, where's your nest?
'Tis in the woods which you love best:
'Tis under a holly and ivy-tree,
Where all the birds would flock to me."

And so on. A musical gentleman took the trouble to mark down the notes of this singular melody, with which the southern towns of Ireland ring on Stephen's Day, called Boxing Day in England; it is in six-eight time, and contains eight bars, ranging over seven tones.

The whole affair is a rude relic of the Christmas gambols of the olden time: as unmeaning now as would be the farce of the Abbot of Misrule. What it ever meant, we believe no person is in a position to say; nor wherefore the death of the wren should signalize the day

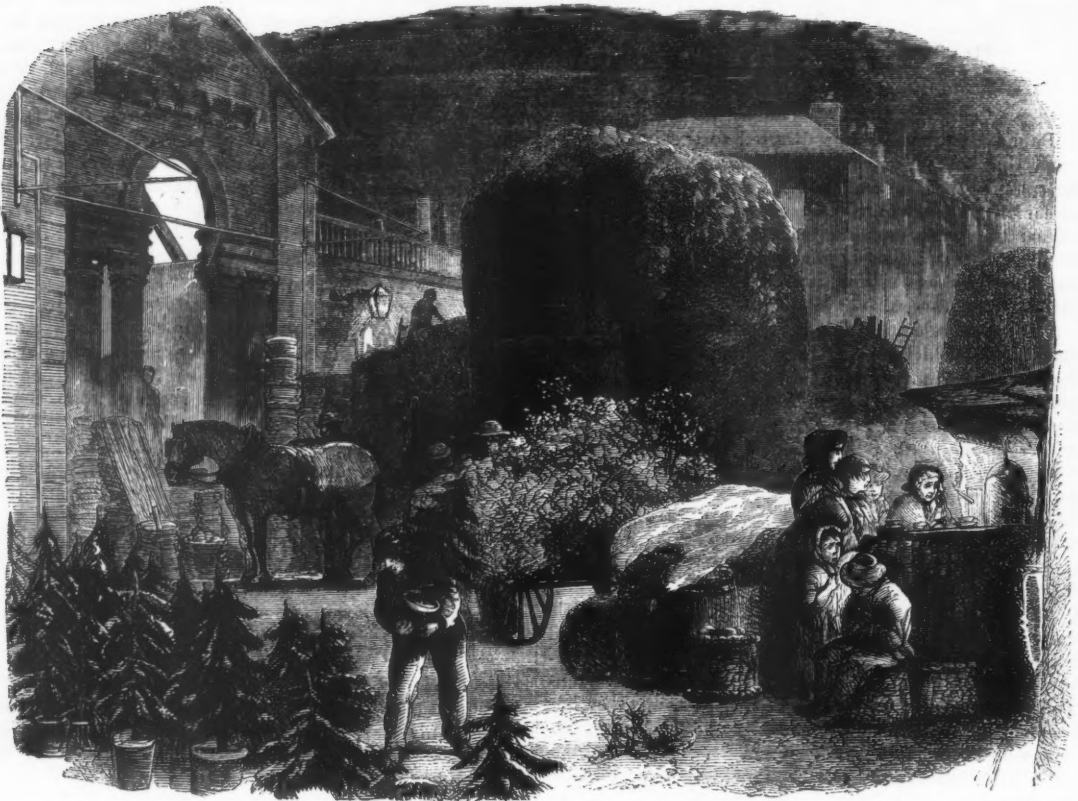
named after the proto-martyr of Christianity. The practical object is clear enough: idle boys thereby lay tribute, as affording a laugh to the younger ones of the household by their fantastic groupings and doings. We have heard that an observance of a similar character takes place in the Isle of Man at the same date annually.

We have indeed heard an explanatory legend, formed somewhat on the model of that which appertains to the Scottish Thistle. Tradition tells, that during one of the many rebellions which kept Ireland in hot water for centuries, a night march was made by a body of rebels on a body of royalists; and about dawn of day they were nearing the sleeping outposts, when lo! a loyal drummer was waked by a tapping on his drum close by; he started up, and beholding the enemy at a little distance through the morning shadows, he gave effectual alarm. It was no spirit that had tapped on the drum (though we might deem this a worthier occasion than those wherein spirits usually tap upon tables), but a little wren, pecking the crumbs left after the drummer's evening meal. Henceforward was a grudge borne to the wren, which generations have not obliterated: and the birds suffer for the unconscious misdeed of their ancestor every Christmas, throughout the provinces of Munster and Connaught.

THE CHRISTMAS FACE OF LONDON.

CHAPTER II.

As Christmas Day approaches nearer, the preparations for the universal festival become more general, active, and characteristic. More business is done, because people who have been dawdling and hesitating as to their plans, must now make up their minds and proceed to action. There is consequently more bustle in the shops and markets; and in all the provision markets, every day of the week in which Christmas day occurs may be called a market day, and every night a market night. All places of traffic in comestibles are now full of life and cheerfulness, and put on a most picturesque appearance, because business is carried on in bowers of greenery, which inclose you round as you enter the shops of the fruiterer or greengrocer, and overshadow you at the market-stalls. An important branch of the Christmas trade is the trade in evergreens; the most favourite plants are the red-berried holly and the mistletoe, but many others are in request, such as the laurel and laurustinus, the yew, the cypress, the ivy, and the evergreen-oak. Some thousands of tons of these Christmas plants, embracing thousands of young growing fir-trees for Christmas trees, are brought to London every season; and, indeed, so general is the demand for them, that there is scarcely a house in the whole circle of the metropolis which has not at least a bush or a twig of something green to symbolize the joyful time. Immense quantities are consumed in decorating the interiors of churches and chapels, where they are wreathed round the pillars and along the galleries, and often mingled with everlasting and manufactured flowers, or beautiful natural bouquets presented for the purpose. The red-berried holly glimmers like a fiery constellation in the dim December atmosphere of a London church; but the mistletoe is never seen there, not being admitted within the sacred precincts. The reason is said to be, that this plant was anciently used by the Druids in their idolatrous and murderous rites, and was thus for ever desecrated. We do not know how this may be—perhaps a sufficient reason may be found in the fact that certain osculatory ceremonies, much more ancient and more agreeable than



COVENT GARDEN THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

anything invented by the Druids, are performed under the mistletoe bough, and are a pretty general household custom at this season; and therefore it would hardly be decorous to hang the plant in the house of worship. In scarce seasons, when the mistletoe plant runs short, it has been known to sell for a high price, as much as a guinea having been paid for a handsome specimen. Of late years, however, the supply has been pretty liberal and constant, the growers having planted the seeds themselves, and not left that operation to the chance work of the birds. The plant grows on apple-trees, and the slimy seeds are sown by merely sticking them to moist decaying portions of the bark. The greater proportion of the annual London consumption comes from the cider counties: a single Herefordshire grower sent last year a lading of five tons of mistletoe to Covent Garden. Much of this plant, as well as of the prickly holly, is hawked about by the costermongers in their carts, and much more is carried about by boys and women on their heads, and sold or bartered for old clothes from door to door.

A stirring sight at this season is the spectacle of Covent Garden Market by night, when the arcade and the stalls are lighted up with gas, when the bulks are burdened with richest stores of winter fruit, the growth of all latitudes and both hemispheres, and decorated with choicest flowers from the green-house, mingled with imitative specimens curiously carved from turnips, or manufactured by the combination of dyed grasses and blossoms of the amaranth; while dense masses of evergreens, hanging from the roof, or heaped in piles upon the floor, give the semblance of the greenwood to the crowded spot. From the shortness of the days, which are now scarcely eight hours long, much of the traffic

has necessarily to be done by gas-light. The dealers at this season resort to the market much later than at other times, and at all hours, both of the day and night, the carts and wagons from the country are arriving and discharging their loads. The dealers, however, have not the game to themselves—the public, in considerable crowds, seizing this convenient opportunity to supply themselves at first hand; this is especially the case on Christmas eve, when the market, so far as evergreens are concerned, is hardly a dealer's market at all, inasmuch as the dealer would hardly buy what he would have no time to sell, the money value of evergreens being but trifling after Christmas Day. Consequently, the general public is the chief buyer on Christmas eve, and he comes here in pretty strong force, confident that now is the proper time for a bargain. Covent Garden Market is usually shut up and deserted by about eight o'clock in the evening; but on Christmas eve, especially if that day occur late in the week, so as to push the next market over to the following Monday, it will continue open and busily active up to ten or eleven o'clock, or even later, there being a natural desire on the part of the market-holders to clear off everything of a rapidly perishable kind, and to disencumber themselves of goods which may soon be valueless.

One of the most astounding phenomena of Christmas time in London, if we could but realize an adequate idea of it, would be presented by the exchange and transmission of Christmas gifts. For many days before the twenty-fifth, there is a running fire of these seasonable offerings outwards from London to the provinces, radiating in all directions, and inwards from all parts of the kingdom to London. The "compliments of the season to you" are not uncommonly expressed by Londoners in



THE CHRISTMAS TRAIN.

the form of barrels of oysters and baskets of fish; and the same courtesy is returned, or comes spontaneously from our country friends, in the form of everything delicious, appetizing, or savoury, that the country affords. The number of parcels and packages of a complimentary kind which arrive by railways in London in the week before Christmas has been estimated broadly at two hundred thousand—a number of which it is impossible to form any idea, and which would give one to every two houses. How they are received, stored, sorted, and delivered, would be a long story to tell, even if we knew it. Some idea of the task which has to be accomplished may be derived from a visit to any of the railway station platforms at this particular crisis. It will be seen that not only are the luggage-vans connected with each train doubled and quadrupled, but passenger carriages have an upper tier of luggage secured and covered in, while the trains themselves are longer than usual, and swarming with country visitors. The disgorging of the vans goes on with a rapidity apparently reckless; mountains of packages cumber the platform, to dissolve away almost as fast as they are formed, being wheeled off on trucks to the carriers' department, in order to clear the ground for a new deluge, which will flow in with the next train. Be the trains fast or slow, parliamentary or express, all are pressed into the carrying service, and each one brings its quota of packages to augment the general pile. Not that there is any time allowed for the huge mass to grow; by a system which one may admire sufficiently without understanding it thoroughly, there is but the minimum of delay occurring between the arrival of these goods at the station and their despatch to every street, court, and cranny of the metropolis, far or near, by the carriers of the railway

company. So complete and well-perfected is the plan that parcels, boxes, cases, and baskets of a lumbering weight, are sorted almost with the celerity and entirely with the precision of letters in the post-office, and in many cases the delivery after arrival, even of a hundred weight package, precedes the delivery of a letter arriving by the same train. This is only accomplished by constant exertion, all parties concerned working late and early. That men and horses too should be well-nigh worked off their legs at such a season is no more than may be looked for; we have met the delivering-carts after midnight on Christmas eve, still going their rounds; and indeed, for the matter of that, have ourselves been knocked and belled out of bed at past one o'clock on Christmas morning, by starlight, to take in a benighted turkey and capons consigned to augment our Christmas cheer.

And now, before Christmas Day dawns upon us, let us turn and look at its approach from another side. Among the three millions of human beings who constitute the population of this overgrown Babylon—a nation in itself—how many are there to whom the season of general festivity brings neither joy nor gladness—who only feel their destitution the deeper and more galling from the spectacle of the general abundance in which they have no share! Alas! the needy, the hungry, and the destitute among us are a large army; the homeless alone amount to thousands; and vast and boundless as is our wealth, it is matched by the depth and hopelessness of our poverty. There is not a man, woman, or child of us who is unaware of this sad fact: how, then, shall we deal with it at this joyous time? Shall we eat, drink, and be merry, while our poor fellow-citizens pine and starve? Or shall we do what we can towards feed-

ing the hungry and clothing the naked, and, by diffusing gladness among others, make our own joy the greater? Fortunately for the poor and needy, there is never much hesitation or debating with London citizens as to which of these two courses they shall pursue. John Bull, whether he lives in town or country, never likes to be feasting himself while he sees others in want; he wouldn't feel at all comfortable in doing so—it would not suit his digestion, not to mention his conscience. So, if you take up a newspaper just at this time, you shall see him appealing to his fellows to come forward and aid him in carrying out various plans of benevolence, each and all of them tending to make Christmas time a joyous time for the poor. He wants to give away coals to warm their homes, blankets to keep out the cold at night, soup to nourish the hungry children, jackets and trousers, and frocks and petticoats, to clothe them; and above all, he is bent upon having Christmas dinners of beef and plum-pudding for those who otherwise would go without. And he will have the dinners too; he will have them in the workhouses; he will have them in the ragged-schools; he will have them in the refuges for the destitute; and in many a poor neighbourhood steeped in misery and vice, he will hire a big room, or put up a big tent, and extemporize a kitchen and set the cooks to work, and give a dinner to as many poor outcasts and vagabonds as choose to partake of it. We know that John will do all this, for we have seen him do it in years past, and do it heartily. Indeed, this custom of feeding the poor at Christmas is a very ancient habit of Londoners, and at this moment the charitable dole of citizens who have been dead and gone for centuries is waiting to be distributed among the poor as soon as Christmas comes round. The poor will get it in the vestry, after the morning service; and if you are curious on the subject you can go if you like, and see the distribution made in many of the old city churches where our forefathers worshipped. The dole consists of bread and money; and the qualifications of the recipients in some cases must be of a grievous kind indeed, none but widows, or maimed or crippled persons, being entitled to it. Other posthumous city charities were not so select in their objects; and there was one, though it is probably no longer administered according to the will of the testator, in virtue of which the churchwardens carried a bag of money with them to the church, and gave a shilling to every poor man, and sixpence to every poor woman, they met by the way. Doubtless the reader will admire the spirit of all these Christmas charities, ancient and modern. Will he excuse our reminding him that, to have a right to admire them, he ought to give according to his ability in their support: of one thing we may all be sure—the best way to enjoy one's own Christmas dinner is to provide another for the poor man who wants it.

The morning of Christmas Day is in London the quietest morning of all the year. Business, which was at a climax yesterday, and indeed during all the past week, now comes to a general pause. Even the shops which never close on the Sunday mornings, will be closed on the Christmas morning—if for no other reason, than for the reason that shopkeepers and shopmen are both utterly fagged and tired out by the extra work of the days and nights of preparation, and the excitement they have had to go through. Housekeepers, of course, are busy enough within doors, “on hospitable thoughts intent;” but there is comparatively little of life and traffic in the streets, unless it be in humble neighbourhoods, where groups of labouring men lounge away the hours before dinner, or hold rather noisy conclaves at

court entries, while their wives are occupied all the forenoon in making ready the beef and pudding. The city is even more tranquil than it is on a Sunday, and along the lines of route through the “genteel” suburbs, there is almost a dead calm—no carts, wagons or drays, no herds of migrating bullocks, no industrial sounds, no street cries, save the early “Mieau” of the solitary milkman, the clink of whose tin pails as he sets them down at the door, is heard far and wide. But for the busses, which plod on upon their customary routes, and for the rattle of an occasional cab, the streets of London would be at this time as still as the sleepy country town on the day after the fair. But at half-past ten the bells begin to ring out for service; and never do the church-bells of the vast city assert themselves more effectively than they do on Christmas morn. Some of them, indeed most of them, toll their usual monotonous “ding, dong,” but some of them will ring out a merry peal in salutation and joyous welcome to “the day when Christ was born;” and sometimes, in the far outskirts of the city, one hears their musical jangle coming up upon the wings of the wind—the voices of a hundred towers and steeples mingling together in one tumultuous echo of gladness. The first response to this sounding summons is not made by the church-goers, but by the working-man's wife, and the journeyman's and small tradesman's housekeeper, who are at this juncture seen hurrying to the bake-house with their joint-laden and pudding-laden dishes and pans—a transfer which they effect with all possible speed, in order to get it over before the church-going crowds get possession of the causeway. For a time the footways are then alive with the throng of worshippers in gayest attire—almost every house sending forth some of its inmates; but soon after the bells have ceased, the throng has cleared off, and there is a general stillness once more.

The church that is not filled on Christmas morning is never filled. In general the Christmas congregation is a more crowded one than usual, the attractions being more. The interior of the church, embowered in evergreens, is a spectacle grateful to all eyes, and to the pious and thoughtful mind suggestive of that immortal hope which endures all shocks, survives all storms and changes, lives through all seasons and all sorrows, and shall be realized in a land of endless joy, “where everlasting spring abides, and never-fading flowers.” Then there is the Christmas anthem, to be sung, perhaps, by infant voices; and there is the Christmas sermon, which is sure to awaken gratitude for past mercies and bounties, and to make appeals to that Christian charity which every grateful heart is at this season so ready to exercise. It is always a cheerful congregation that streams out of the church-doors, to the grand organ pealing the Hallelujah Chorus, at the close of the Christmas service, and it is a pleasant thing to face them in their walk homewards, and share in the general satisfaction.

The aspect of the streets changes in a marked manner as the afternoon approaches. In proportion as the dinner-hour is imminent, the cabs become very much in request, and we see them rattling off in all directions at a headlong pace; in fact, there are not cabs enough to be had, and many a cosy party, intending to ride, have to hurry off to the rendezvous on foot. It is hardly fair to scan these groups too inquisitively. Though Paterfamilias will obligingly carry Miss Bell's dress-shoes in his pockets, he doesn't care that you should note them sticking out; and if madame, to save her dress cap from being crushed, should wrap it in tissue paper and pin it under her shawl, what is that to you? *Laissez faire*, as the French say—it is all right and proper.

There go a family of laughing children to dine with grandmamma, who has plum-pudding, and roast-goosed, and mince-pied, and snapdragoned, and Christmas-treed every one of them every year since they knew what Christmas meant. Rat-a-tat-tat!—that is a whole household, papa, mamma, the five girls and little Master Bobby come to Christmas it at No. 9; and le! there is a bevy at No. 10, of an equal number going to be entertained somewhere else. Yonder comes Plumblin the builder's foreman, in a spotted neck-tie and a bran-new spriggy waistcoat, his boots shining like patent leather, on his way to dine with his employer; and there goes Potter, the steam stoker, bound for his mother's two pair back, with something to cheer the heart of the old woman. The knockers are pealing, the cabs are bowling along, the clatter of tripping feet, and the ring of cheerful voices, resound on all sides, and for an hour or two that section of London population, who on this day play the part of guests, have the streets almost to themselves. By and by, however, as the early darkness broods down upon the city, there comes a silence with it, which in some quarters is almost total. On the evening of Christmas Day one may walk for miles through the million-peopled city, and meet but very few beyond the guardians of the night; for now the guests are all under the roof-tree, and though every house have a banquet within, there is a prevailing solitude without. How sad that solitude to the houseless wanderer for whom there is neither home, nor food, nor cheerful fire, nor voice of friendly greeting.

And what of the Christmas dinner, and the luxurious dessert long drawn out, with talk of the old days and the new changes—the memories of the past and speculations on the future? Is it all unmingled pleasure and conviviality? Of a truth, no! Happily for us all, no; For it is well for us that at times like these, regrets should mingle with our joys. "Better," said the wise king, "is it to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting." For our parts, we find that when we go to the house of feasting on Christmas Day, we go to the house of mourning too. The year that has vanished since last we met has too often borne away with it treasures that shall never return—treasures of friendship, of love, of true manliness, of moral worth—called away into the silent land, and lost to us for ever. The eloquent voice of last year is now mute; the bright eye which looked a welcome too warm for words is quenched in night; the hand that clasped ours has been gripped fast by *him* of the inverted torch; and the bounding heart which shared our joys and griefs is a clod. Shall we give way to gloom because this is so? Rather let us celebrate Christmas Day with jubilant gladness that HE has come into the world who shall restore all things; and let us so live that

"Our lives shall be one Christmas-tide."

MATTHEW PRIOR.

In the year 1779, the principal booksellers of London, irritated by the piracies of provincial and other interpolers, resolved to publish a superior edition of the works of the most eminent English Poets. The only lasting result of this enterprise was their employment of Dr. Johnson to write a preface to the works of each author, containing a few dates and a general character; but he was led beyond this intention "by the honest desire of giving useful pleasure," and produced the "Lives of the Poets," one of the standard treasures of English literature.

Of the fifty-two names contained in this great work, how few at the present day are known to the cultivators of poetry! Ask the most diligent of such students what they know of Pomfret, Yalden, Stepney, or Montague, and the answer would be, absolutely nothing. The works of such writers, flimsy and forgotten as they are now, brought in their own days both fame and fortune; for they introduced their authors to the notice of politicians—an event which is now brought about by speeches, pamphlets, reviews, or newspaper articles. In the time of William and Anne, to join the wits and publish verses, was almost sure to cause advancement in the world. Charles Montague and Matthew Prior joined in a poem called the "City Mouse and Country Mouse," a burlesque of Dryden's "Hind and Panther," written by him in commendation of the "spotless character" of the Church of Rome. Both authors were speedily preferred. Montague became Chancellor of the Exchequer, and ultimately Earl of Halifax and Knight of the Garter, and had a most conspicuous share in a very important public measure—the reformation of the silver coinage in the reign of King William. We do not mean to follow the fortunes of Montague at present, but proceed to tell something of Prior.

The origin of Matthew Prior was obscure and doubtful. He was born July 21, 1664, at "Winburn," some say of Dorsetshire, some of Middlesex; and his father was said to be a joiner, of London. By his father's death he fell into the hands of an uncle, Samuel Prior, who kept the "Rummer Tavern" near Charing Cross. He sent Matthew for some time to Dr. Busby, at Westminster; but, not intending to give him any education beyond that of the school, he took him, when well advanced in literature, into his own house, where he was found by the Earl of Dorset reading Horace. Dorset, himself a poet, and a great patron of genius, was so well pleased with his proficiency, that he undertook the cost of his academical education. He was entered at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1682, in his eighteenth year; in four years became a bachelor; and in 1700, by mandate he obtained his Master's degree.

Prior, in 1691, was sent to the Congress at the Hague, as Secretary to the Embassy. In this assembly was formed the grand alliance against Louis XIV. The conduct of Prior was so pleasing to King William, that he made him one of the gentlemen of his bed-chamber. In 1697 he was secretary to the Embassy at the Treaty of Ryswick, and received from the Lords Justices a present of two hundred guineas for bringing over the Treaty of Peace. Next year he had the same office at the Court of France, where he was regarded with great distinction. As he was one day surveying the apartments at Versailles, being shown the victories of Louis, painted by Le Brun, and asked whether the King of England's palace had any such decorations, "The monuments of my master's actions," said he, "are to be seen everywhere but in his own house." In the following year he was at Loo with William, from whom, after a long audience, he carried orders to England, and upon his arrival became Under Secretary of State in the Earl of Jersey's office. In the Parliament that met in 1701, he was chosen representative for East Grinstead, one of the burghs extinguished by the Reform Bill of 1832. About this time he changed his party, and joined the Tories. A great part of the reign of King William, and all that of Queen Anne, was a period of violent faction; and the objects for which the opposing parties contended were of great magnitude and importance. Whatever plausibilities might be put forward by either side, the real struggle was to keep out or to restore the

Stuart family. If the Whigs prevailed, then the liberties of England obtained by the Revolution were secured, and the power of France kept within bounds; if the Tories got into power, then it was feared that the tyranny and persecutions of James II would be re-enacted, and Europe laid prostrate at the feet of France.

The war was conducted with brilliant success, on the part of Marlborough and the English arms; but it was obviously continued longer than was necessary—too much, it is to be feared, to gratify at once the avarice and the ambition of the great commander. There were doubtless many substantial reasons why the nation got weary of the Whig ministry; but the court gossip assigned as the proximate cause of its downfall the haughty and impertinent conduct of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who refused to give the Queen some gloves of a peculiar make, and who in her presence, by a pretended mistake, upset a bowl of water on the gown of Lady Masham, one of the ladies of the court. The Tories got into power, and were in haste to end the war. They sent Prior privately to Paris with propositions of peace. There was an Abbé Gaultier, who had been chaplain in London to one of the Embassies. He went to M. de Torcy, the French minister, and without any preamble said, "Do you wish for peace, monsieur? I bring you the means of treating about it." Torcy said, "It was like asking a dying man if he wished to be cured." In a month, Prior returned from Paris, bringing with him the Abbé and M. Memager, a minister from France, invested with full powers. The negotiation was begun at Prior's house, where the Queen's ministers met Memager, and entered upon business. The assembly was in some degree clandestine, the design of treating not being yet openly declared, and, when the Whigs returned to power, was aggravated to a charge of high treason. To be an active politician in those days, was a game of tremendous risk. In our time, when a party gives way to its rivals, noble lords or honourable gentlemen merely go into opposition on the other side of the house; but in old times, a defeat implied exile, confinement in the Tower, and sometimes the scaffold and the block.

After tedious discussions, the Peace of Utrecht was at last concluded, and Prior remained at Paris in public dignity and splendour, from August, 1713, till the same month in the following year.

Queen Anne died on the 1st of August, 1714; the Tory power was demolished, and Prior degraded and recalled. From his allowances being ill paid, he had got into debt, and could not leave Paris till March, 1715, when he returned home, and was welcomed with a warrant, but was suffered to live in his own house, under the custody of the messenger, till he was examined by a Committee of the Privy Council, of which Walpole was chairman. After his examination, he was told by Walpole that the committee were not satisfied with his behaviour, nor could give such account of it to the Commons as might merit favour; and that they now thought a stricter confinement necessary than to his own house. When an act of grace was passed, in 1717, he was excepted, and continued still in custody, but was soon after discharged. He died at Wimpole, a seat of the Earl of Oxford, on the 18th of September 1721, aged fifty-seven, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The melancholy summation of his character by Johnson is in these words:—"His opinions, so far as the means of judging are left us, were right; but his life was, it seems, irregular, negligent, and sensual."

When we enter Poets' Corner, at Westminster Abbey, the most conspicuous object that strikes our eye is the monument of Prior, for which, as the "last piece of

human vanity," he left £500. There is a long Latin epitaph, describing his public employments, his school, his college, his acquirements, his genius, and his social qualities. The monument is by Rysbrack; and there is a bust by Caizevox, which was executed by the order of the French king.

As a poet, Prior unquestionably was a man of genius; but the greater portion of his pieces should never have been written. One of his most pleasing performances is entitled "Solomon;" deservedly admired by many critics, for it contains some of the most striking passages in the life and writings of the wise king of Israel, transferred into English verse by a true poet. The purpose of Prior is thus stated by himself:—"The noble images and reflections, the profound reasonings upon human actions, and excellent precepts for the government of life, which are found in the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and other books of Solomon, afford subjects for finer poems in every kind, than have, I think, as yet appeared in the Greek, Latin, or any modern language. Out of this great treasure, which lies heaped up together in a confused magnificence above all order, I had a mind to collect and digest such observations and apophthegms as most particularly tend to the proof of that great assertion, laid down in the beginning of Ecclesiastes, 'All is vanity.'" Prior judged it necessary to form some story, and give a kind of body to the poem, the whole of which is a soliloquy. Solomon is the person that speaks: he is at once the hero and the author; but he tells us very often what others say to him.

The subject of the first book is *Knowledge*. Solomon, seeking happiness from knowledge, convenes the learned men of his kingdom, and proposes many questions to them. Though he himself had spoken of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, there were many things about plants which puzzled him:—

"The twining jasmine and the blushing rose,
With lavish grace their morning scents disclose.
The smelling tuberose and jonquil declare,
The stronger impulse of an evening air.

Along the sunny bank or flowery mead,
Ten thousand stalks their various blossoms spread,
Peaceful and lowly in their native soil,
They neither know to spin, nor care to toil;
Yet, with confessed magnificence, deride
Our vile attire and impotence of pride.
The cowslip smiles, in brighter yellow dressed
Than that which veils the nubile virgin's breast.
A fairer red stands blushing in the rose
Than that which on the bridegroom's vestment flows.
Take but the humblest lily of the field,
And if our pride will to our reason yield,
It must by sure comparison be shown
That on the regal seat, great David's son,
Arrayed in all his robes and types of power,
Shines with less glory than that simple flower."

The second book is upon *Pleasure*. Again seeking happiness, he inquires if wealth and greatness can produce it—the magnificence of gardens and buildings, the luxury of music, feasting, and wine:—

"I drank; I liked it not; 'twas rage; 'twas noise;
An airy scene of transitory joys.
In vain I trusted that the flowing bowl
Would banish sorrow, and enlarge the soul.
Perhaps the jest that charmed the sprightly crowd,
And made the jovial table laugh so loud,
To some false notion owed its poor pretence—
To an ambiguous word's perverted sense,
To a wild sonnet or a wanton air,
Offence and torture to the sober ear.
Perhaps, alas! the pleasing stream was brought
From this man's error, from another's fault;
From topics which good nature would forget,
And prudence mention with the last regret."

And what was the consequence of all this mad pursuit of pleasure?

"I found the king abandoned to neglect,
Seen without awe, and served without respect.
I found my subjects amicably join
To lessen their defects by citing mine.
The father, whilst he warned his erring son
The sad examples which he ought to shun,
Each bard, each sire, did to his pupil sing,
A wise child better than a foolish king."

The happiness from *Power* was still to be tried; this is the subject of the third book. From his father David he had inherited a mighty kingdom and boundless power; but in the exercise of it he had been compelled to do many dreadful deeds—to kill his brother Adonijah, to murder Joab, to cut off Shimei. An angel who appears tells him that his splendid kingdom will be departed and lost by the folly of his senseless and tyrannical son; that Judah would fight against Israel, and Ephraim vex Judah; that the ten tribes should be scattered, and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed; but that at last, One should spring from his race, more than king in dignity and power.

"Now, Solomon, remembering who thou art,
Act through thy remnant life the decent part:
Go forth; be strong; with patience and with care
Perform and suffer; to thyself severe,
Gracious to others.—Be humble, and be just.

Restore, Great Father, thy instructed son;
And in my act, may THY GREAT WILL BE DONE."

There are many beautiful and impressive passages in Prior's "Solomon;" but when we think of the Bible Ecclesiastes, we cannot help saying the old is better:—"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Prior wrote a poem called "Alma; or, the Soul," in ridicule of the theories which described the operations of the mind by images drawn from the anatomy of the body; such as, that the soul dwells in the pineal gland, as the most central part of the brain. The poem is very lively, and in Hudibrastic verse—but quite unintelligible to those who are not metaphysicians and anatomists.

Prior adds one to the many instances which Great Britain affords, of men of low condition coming to be very eminent. It was indeed wonderful that a vintner's apprentice should be the friend and favourite of William III and Louis XIV, and be employed as a chief agent in concluding the Peace of Utrecht, and closing one of the most formidable wars that ever agitated Europe.

He likewise affords an example of the power of early habits; for he too much delighted in low company, and wrote too frequently like a pedant or a schoolboy. "But," says Johnson, "on higher occasions and nobler subjects, when habit was overpowered by the necessity of reflection, he wanted not wisdom as a statesman, nor elegance as a poet."

A MOUNTAIN OF COAL.

At this season, when the blazing fire in our grates receives a large proportion of our attention, and the thoughts of many a housewife stray naturally to the coal-cellar and its supply, it may not be amiss to look into one of the great coal-cellars of our globe, and speculate upon what we find there. English consumers are perhaps never likely to burn a block from its countless tons of fuel, for they are stowed away in a certain

county of Pennsylvania: and instead of being accumulated in the deep places of the earth, they lie heaped, as though in a profusion which had exhausted underground storage, in a mountain summit far above the level of the sea.

In the year 1792, a man walking over this summit saw, thrust out of the green ground, the angle of a rock of coal. He examined farther, and found that the grass was merely a carpet over a flooring of such coal: he informed General Weiss, owner of the land, of the value which lay beneath his soil. The General, being ill-advised, sold the whole crest of the mountain next year for a trifling sum to the Lehigh Coal Company, so called from the little river which they hoped to make their channel of traffic. For the next thirty years they seemed to have made a bad bargain: before 1821 scarce a thousand tons of the treasure had been sold. But the forests of the country were dying out, perishing in ten thousand stoves, which ere long must have other fuel; the prejudice against coal gradually yielded to the necessity of the case, and in 1830 the sales of the company had amounted to a hundred thousand tons. The desolate wilderness, amid which rose the coal summit, was becoming alive with miners' cabins and needful workshops; the wild rocky mountain stream called Lehigh was educated into a sort of tame canal, restrained within dams and deepened; twenty such dams and sluice-gates were erected on the watercourse, between the little town of Mauch Chunk, nearest the mine, and the newer settlement of Whitehaven: the latter so named from its analogy to the English port. The former name, Mauch Chunk, is Indian, signifying the Bear's Mountain: a reminiscence of the olden forest times when as yet the country was verily "Penn's Sylvain," or woodland, and the red men hunting the savage denizens of the wilderness knew nothing of the grand civilizing agent—the coal—beneath their tread. A thousand feet above the little town rises Mount Piscau, crested with the combustible summit before described, which, to use Kohl's words, "can be cut up like a loaf, in slices, and shovelled away."

Rather more elaborate, however, is the mode of working, even by his own account. Though in many places the coal lies just under the turf, so that a labourer's pickaxe and spade can lay it bare; yet, when the seams come to be sixty feet thick, and lie in sloping strata, a regular system of cutting open is required. When the beds are inclined to the surface at an angle of eighteen or twenty degrees, a passage called a gangway is bored horizontally from the side of the mountain through a series of the seams; from this gangway upwards, other openings are bored along the seams, and here the coal is excavated, and sent gliding down these shoots to the wagon, standing on the tramway below the opening, which conveys it to the railway, in daylight, at the end of the horizontal passage. Tier above tier is worked thus—a congeries of level and sloping passages permeating the whole mine at regular intervals, wherever the coal lies at a suitable angle, to roll by its own weight to the wagons. We should mention that in each of the shoots there is a slide or trap door, to regulate the flow of the coal downwards. Mules are the motive power on the tramways inside the mine; but where the seams are horizontal, a steam engine on the surface is used to draw up wagons full of coal through a shaft, as in our English mines.

"Robbing the pillars" is a perilous expedient, sometimes adopted by incautious workmen, and which has more than once led to disaster by weakening the supports of the passages. By order, walls ten feet thick are left at certain intervals. The traveller Kohl walked through

many of the spacious vaulted passages, and climbed the ladders into the shoots, and thoroughly inspected the system of working. He found a thousand men there, healthy and hard-working; in their idle hours they constituted a corps of military volunteers on Summit Hill, and their homes were in a variety of villages in the two neighbouring valleys of Mauch Chunk and Panther's Creek. They came up to their work daily, and the coal went down, by means of a railway without locomotive, worked by an endless chain. One line is called the "Heavy Down Track," because trains of loaded wagons glide by it to Mauch Chunk continually; another, the "Back Track," because it brings up empty coal wagons from the river continually: in general, about seventy times in a working day. The whole surface of the coal crest of the mountain is a network of rails. The second railway in the United States was opened here in 1827. Our traveller descended from the mines in a carriage whose own weight was its propeller; and the conductor's duty was to govern the break machinery as the train glided with arrow swiftness by a winding tramway through thickets.

This mountain of coal is calculated to comprise 180,000,000 tons! The world may be easy about its fuel for awhile, when we learn that this vast supply is but as a point amid the coal basins of the States. West of Ohio Valley and the Mississippi River are other coal measures, all bituminous, whereas those in the Pennsylvanian territory are altogether anthracite. The whole country is a concealed coal-field about Mauch Chunk; one county is called Carbon—an appropriate cognomen for land just veiling such stores of fuel. The Lehigh company possesses 6000 acres, each acre covering 30,000 tons of coal. Up to 1854 they had unearthed 4,000,000 of tons.

Another great coal-cellar of the States lies in the Swanton Valley, deep between two spurs of the Alleghanies. Here the mighty twin powers, iron and coal, lie side by side in strata. The whole town of Swanton—called after its founder, who yet lives and rules—is built upon a rock of coal; so that the vaults and basement stories of the houses are scooped from it. A great rail-mill, turning out 12,000 tons of rails annually, is worked by the aforesaid coal, in a spot where living men remember only a few peasants' huts. Now the town has eight or nine thousand inhabitants, and is remarkable for its freedom from crime, owing to the teetotalism which prevails.

Yet another vast reservoir of coal lies in that Valley of Wyoming, the scene of so many romantic associations in history and song. The River Susquehanna runs over

a channel of coal through the midst of it; and close to the water's edge are the mouths of mines; so that the coal can be almost shovelled out of the earth into the ships, which carry away more than 700,000 tons annually. The town here has an odd-compounded name—Wilkes-Barre; so called in grateful memory of two members of the British Parliament, who defended the rights of the Connecticut settlers of Wyoming against their Pennsylvanian neighbours. Now, over this town, owing to the nature of the anthracite coal which is burned, broods not the slightest cloud of smoke. The trade of chimney-sweep is utterly unknown. Suppose London tried anthracite coal!

Not far from Wilkesbarre (as it is commonly written) are certain abandoned mines, sufficiently picturesque to an imaginative explorer, who can wander a long way amid a labyrinth of colossal black pillars, reminding him of the cavern temples of Elephanta and Ellora; halls and arcades they seem by the imperfect light of his torch, with recesses of a darkness darker than in any architecture he has ever seen. No sound comes to his ear but the occasional drip of a disturbed spring from a crevice of jet, or the velvet flight of some purblind bat. It is likely that about a thousand years may elapse (if the world last so long) ere any contemporary of Macaulay's New Zealander could roam in a similar manner through the deserted gangways of our Mountain of Coal.

TO THE DEPARTING YEAR.

FRIEND, whose strange and quiet oar,
Cleaving Time's great sea,
Touched upon our rocky shore,
Now farewell to thee!
One mild star at evening's gate
Lights thy tresses grey;
Go, with thy mysterious freight,
Hoist thy sail—away!

Thee, upon life's quicksands driven,
Winds detaining blew;
But thy carrier doves to heaven
Every moment flew.
We, unconscious of their flight,
Passed thee heedless by,
Heard not through the restless night
Thine unceasing cry.

Now thy mild departing face
Turned to that calm sea,
Meekly chides our want of grace
That we slighted thee.
Go, but ere thou quite depart,
With the vanished years,
Take upon thy silent heart
Our repentant tears.

M. P.

END OF THE TWELFTH VOLUME.

Errata.—In some copies the following errors appear:—P. 7, col. 2, line 22 from bottom, *glow* for *slow*—worm. P. 120, col. 1, *Sowerby* for *Somersby*; Col. 2, 1850 for 1820. P. 143, col. 2, *decametre* for *decimetre* (in 9th line below small figures); in line 23 from bottom, *23* for *25*. P. 216, col. 2, fifth line from bottom, 1853 for 1852.

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